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C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000168

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/10/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ODIP](#) [OFDP](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: REGIME REPEATS "SUGGESTION" THAT AMBASSADOR
DEPART, MOVES TO CONSTRAIN U.S. DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY

REF: A. MINSK 163
[1](#)B. MINSK 033 (EXDIS)
[1](#)C. STEWART-KRAMER TELCON 03/08/08

Classified By: Ambassador Karen B. Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) DCM was summoned Saturday March 8 to meet with MFA Americas Department Director Vadim Lazerko and North America Head Sergey Sergeyev. Lazerko provided a diplomatic note (e-mailed to EUR/UMB) which repeated the key points made verbally by Deputy Foreign Minister Gaysyonok March 7 (ref A), namely: 1) the MFA "insistently recommends" that Ambassador depart Belarus for consultations with the USG; 2) the MFA "suggests" that the Embassy reduce the number of U.S. diplomats in Minsk to the number of diplomats Belarus has at its diplomatic representation (its embassy in Washington); and 3) the MFA "expects" that all of Embassy Minsk's contacts with GOB institutions and (state-owned) enterprises, as well as travel to Belarus' regions by Embassy staff, will be conducted from now on only through the MFA. Lazerko also provided a copy of the State Department's March 7 press briefing, and complained that the information provided had not been accurate.

[1](#)2. (C) DCM, accompanied by conoff (notetaker), explained to Lazerko that a response would require discussion with Washington and would be forthcoming. He added that there was no provision in the Vienna Convention for a state to require a government to recall its Ambassador for consultations and that no decision had been made to do so. On the subject of mission staffing, the DCM told Lazerko that there was no current justification for any reduction in the staff of the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, all of whom were performing essential tasks, and that any forced reduction in staffing would require reciprocal steps with reference to both the Belarusian Embassy in Washington and its sole constituent post, the Belarusian Consulate General in New York. In terms of new requirements imposing an MFA role in Embassy meetings and travel outside of Minsk, DCM requested that the U.S. Embassy be informed in writing of any procedures in order to ensure both that the Embassy could review them and for the USG to impose reciprocal restrictions on Belarusian staff in the U.S. DCM confirmed to Lazerko that there had been a minor misstatement in the March 7 briefing, but informed the Americas Department Director that the statement of Deputy Foreign Minister Gaysyonok -- that the U.S. had departed from an agreed "algorithm" on issues relating to political prisoners (ref B) -- was false.

Comment

[1](#)3. (C) While the story is far from over, this latest step indicates that the ineptitude of the Belarusian regime is multilayered: the last-minute diplomatic note -- and its awkwardly-phrased pronouncements -- added nothing to the previous day's anti-American bluster. We conclude that the regime is being squeezed and does not know how to react:

their failure to release Kozulin before his wife's long-anticipated passing and amateurish attempt to respond to growing U.S. economic sanctions offer further proof that a corrupt dictatorship is running scared.

STEWART